

NCA

VOC FOR PGM/FN

BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6184
LARRY LESUEUR

OCTOBER 5, 1978

CARTER AND CONGRESS--A SHOWDOWN?

ANNCR:

PRESIDENT CARTER'S CAMPAIGN TO MOBILIZE PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST A BIG CONGRESSIONAL SPENDING BILL HAS PITTED HIM AGAINST HIS OWN DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP IN CONGRES.. VOA'S LARRY LESUEUR EXAMINES THE SITUATION.

VOICE:

A CLASSIC CLASH APPEARS ALMOST INEVITABLE BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT'S APPEAL FOR A FIGHT AGAINST INFLATION AND AN END-OF-THE-SESSION CONGRESSIONAL DRIVE FOR MASSIVE PUBLIC WORKS PROJECTS. PRESIDENT CARTER HIMSELF SET THE STAGE FOR THE CONFRONTATION WITH A FIRMLY-WORDED ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS INTENTION TO VETO THE TEN THOUSAND MILLION DOLLAR PUBLIC WORKS APPROPRIATION APPROVED BY BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS.

BACKED BY STOUT DEMOCRATIC PARTY CONGRESSIONAL MAJORITIES, THE BIG SPENDING BILL WOULD PROVIDE FUNDS NOT ONLY FOR ENERGY RESEARCH WHICH MR. CARTER FAVORS, BUT ALSO FOR A NUMBER OF WATER CONTROL PROJECTS MR. CARTER OPPOSES. IN FACT, HE THOUGHT HE HAD SUCCESSFULLY BLOCKED SOME OF THESE WESTERN DAM-BUILDING PROJECTS LAST YEAR, BUT CONGRESS RESURRECTED THEM.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S INITIATIVE IN SETTING UP THIS CLASH OF WILLS WITH THE CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP WOULD NOT HAVE SEEMED LIKELY A FEW MONTHS AGO, WHEN MR. CARTER WAS FARING POORLY IN THE PUBLIC OPINION POLLS. BUT NOW MR. CARTER'S PRESTIGE IS ON THE UPSWING IN THE AFTERMATH OF CAMP DAVID AND SOME LAST-MINUTE

SUCCESSES IN CONGRESS, SUCH AS A FOREIGN AID BILL THAT WILL GIVE THE ADMINISTRATION MUCH OF WHAT IT WANTS, AND THE FIRST BIG REFORM OF THE FEDERAL CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEM IN A HUNDRED YEARS, WHICH NOW AWAITS FINAL ACTION.

(OPT) MISTER CARTER ALSO GOT THE RAILROAD STRIKERS BACK TO WORK AND HAS PROPOSED AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE TO END THE FIGHTING IN LEBANON. (END OPT) UNTIL NOW PRESIDENT CARTER HAS EXERCISED HIS CONGRESSIONAL VETO AUTHORITY VERY SPARINGLY. IN FACT HE EMPLOYED IT FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS YEAR TO KILL A TWO THOUSAND MILLION DOLLAR AIRCRAFT CARRIER. AND CONGRESS SUSTAINED HIM. (OPT) MR. CARTER ALSO TOLD A WHITE HOUSE NEWS CONFERENCE THAT HE WISHED HE HAD USED HIS VETO MORE OFTEN DURING HIS FIRST YEAR IN OFFICE. (END OPT) BUT NOW HIS PROMISED VETO OF THE BIG PUBLIC WORKS BILL WHICH BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS APPROVED, HAS LEFT THE CONGRESSIONAL DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP SMARTING UNDER THE STING OF THE WORDS HE USED TO DESCRIBE THE BILL'S LACK OF MERIT. HE CALLED IT "ECONOMICALLY BLOATED," "WASTEFUL" AND SAID IT REMINDED HIM OF A "PORK-BARREL."

(OPT) ON THE SENATE FLOOR, DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY LEADER ROBERT BYRD RESPONDED WITH A RARE CRITICISM OF THE PRESIDENT, SAYING HE MADE A WRONG DECISION AND THAT HE HOPED THE SENATE WOULD OVERRIDE A VETO. AND IN THE HOUSE, SPEAKER THOMAS O'NEILL, A DEMOCRATIC STALWART, SAID A CARTER VETO WOULD BE "LIKE AN OSTRICH STICKING ITS HEAD IN THE SAND." THE HOUSE SPEAKER WENT ON TO WARN THAT A VETO OF THE POPULAR PUBLIC WORKS BILL COULD COST THE ADMINISTRATION VOTES ON THE LONG-SOUGHT ENERGY BILL WHICH FOLLOWS. (END OPT)

WHETHER THE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ARE ANNOYED ENOUGH TO MARSHAL THE NECESSARY TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY IN BOTH HOUSES REQUIRED TO OVERCOME A PRESIDENTIAL VETO IS NOT CERTAIN. BUT SOME THINK THAT EVEN IF THE VETO IS OVERRIDDEN BY CONGRESS, MR. CARTER WOULD STRENGTHEN HIS PUBLIC IMAGE BY STANDING FIRM ON A HIGHLY VISIBLE ISSUE, SINCE PUBLIC SPENDING IS WIDELY BLAMED FOR CAUSING INFLATION--THE NUMBER ONE PUBLIC CONCERN.

NO MATTER WHAT THE OUTCOME IN CONGRESS, THE DEVELOPING SITUATION MAY TELL MUCH ABOUT HOW FAR PRESIDENT CARTER, HITHERTO HAMPERED BY LOW PUBLIC OPINION RATINGS, WILL NOW GO TO ASSERT HIS LEADERSHIP.

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WJL/RD